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KOVILOOR MADALAYAM

The Mutts of Sri Sankara

A LEGAL REVIEW

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By :

Sri M. Swaminatha Iyer, B. A., B. L

ADVOCATE, SALEM.

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	Judicial Pronouncements ...	1
II.	Verdict of Jurists ...	8
III.	A "Fifth Mutt" ...	14
IV.	Sringeri and South India ...	21
V.	Dharma Prachara ...	26
VI.	Duty of the Disciples ...	31

6-2

THE MUTTS OF SRI SANKARA

A LEGAL REVIEW

1. Judicial Pronouncements

It is a well known historical fact that Sri Sankara Bhagavatpadacharya established four Amnaya Pithas in the four corners of this Sacred Land of Bharatavarsha to carry on the great work of preserving its characteristic spirituality. This has been emphasised by many an eminent scholar and historian on literary, historical, epigraphical and other data. It will be interesting to consider also how several judicial authorities and eminent jurists have dealt with this matter.

(1) The earliest mention of a Math founded by Sri Sankara, by a British Court, is in the case reported in 3 Moore's Indian Appeals page 198. There the Swami of a Mutt was obstructed in an attempt to go in procession in Addaki Pallaki, that is, the palanquin being held cross-wise. He alleged that it was an exclusive privilege of the Sringeri Mutt of which he claimed to be a representative. The report opens with the remarks of the reporter as to the genesis of the case

He says "According to the opinion which prevails amongst the Brahmins throughout India, a great religious teacher named Sri Shanker Acharya who is represented as an incarnation of the Deity flourished about 1000 years ago and reformed Hindu modes of worship which had become very corrupt He introduced so many changes that he is looked upon as the founder of that which is now regarded as the orthodox faith of the Hindus, of which the Brahminical professors are called the Smartava sect or

that which professes the doctrine of the Smritis or inspired Codes of Law. In order to preserve and propagate his doctrine, Shankaracharya established a Math or Sevasthan (College) at Sringeri in Mysore of which he was the Swami or high priest. From him descended a long line of Swamis who presided over the Mutt at Sringeri and who are called heirs, or more correctly, successors of Shankaracharya. In process of time, the Sringeri Sevasthan has become divided into five or six maths of which the Swamis claim to be regarded as successors of Shankaracharya and of his most eminent successor Sri Vidyaranya who flourished about seven centuries ago. As successors of these distinguished persons, the Swamis of these different maths claim and recognise in each other an equal participation in the honour and privileges accorded to the founder by the princes of India who at all times appear to have held these Maths in high honour and treated their Swamis with the utmost reverence. Among the privileges and honours said to have been there originally conferred was the one now in contest. The appellant who claimed to be heir or successor of the above mentioned Swamis of Sringeri contended that the privilege of the Adavi Palki appertains exclusively to those Swamis who are heirs and spiritual representatives of Sri Sankaracharya and Sri Vidyaranya Swami."

These statements do not form part of the judgement in the case and cannot have any value as a judicial pronouncement. The case was remanded by the Privy Council on 5—7—1843 to the Bombay Sudder Dewanny Adawlet Court for a fresh trial. It must be mentioned in this context that the Swami who claimed this privilege was not really a successor in the Sringeri Mutt, but was the head of a branch mutt which chose to claim the privileges of the parent Mutt.

(2) When the Swami thus faced opposition, he marched into the Nizam's state, claiming the same honours hoping that a Musalman ruler might not question his claims. But unfortunately for him, the Prime Minister of that State appointed an influential Pancha to go into the question and report to the Government. When the report was received, the Government accepted it in full in October 1843 and issued several firmans directing that the honours and privileges belonging to the Sringeri Mutt should not be allowed to that Mutt.

To prevent similar claims by others, the firmans extended the direction to other 'petty' Mutts among which were listed Kumbakonam, and several others. Similar orders were issued by the Raja of Vanaparti also. It will appear from this that the five or six Mutts vaguely referred to by the reporter in the Privy Council case were these mutts.

(3) The case in 17 Madras 435 relates to a Madhwa Mutt in South Kanara but Subramanya Iyer J. in the course of his judgement refers to Sri Sankaracharya. On page 438 he says: "As pointed out in Mr. Ghose's Hindu Law P. 680 not less than seven Mutts, being among the most celebrated, owe their origin to the great Advaita philosopher, Sankaracharya. The influence exercised by Mutts as centres of learning on the religious and other literature of the country cannot be denied. The varied and well-known contributions made thereto by the famous Vidyaranya Swami of the Sringeri or Sarada Mutt or under his auspices are among the most conspicuous examples of this kind. There is scarcely a branch of learning considered by Hindus as important to which Vidyaranya and the scholars whom he gathered round him did not

make valuable contributions and it is to his commentaries that the modern world owes its knowledge of the traditional meaning of the oldest of sacred books, the Rig Veda. "

Though this is but a side remark, it is entitled to great weight as coming from Sir S. Subramania Iyer who later on held the high posts of the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court and Vice Chancellor of the Madras University. His mention however of seven Mutts is only a quotation from Mr. Ghose and cannot be viewed as his opinion. It is not improbable that he had in mind only the Sringeri Mutt and the five or six Mutts in South India mentioned in the Privy Council case.

(4) In 33 Bombay 278 a person claiming to be Sankaracharya of the Jyotir Mutt at Badri (one of the recognisied four Mutts) toured in Gujarat and the Sankaracharya of the Dwaraka Mutt (another recognised Mutt) filed a suit against the former disputing his title as a Sankaracharya of the Jyotir Mutt which had long ago become extinct, The High Court of Bombay dismissed the suit on the main ground that the Dwaraka Swami was not legally affected by the other person claiming to be the Sankaracharya of another Mutt. Chief Justice Scott in the course of his judgement says: - " It is not disputed that the religious reformer Shankar, about the eighth century A. D. established four Mutts or monasteries for Sanyasis and ascetics in the north, south, east and west of India, namely the Jyotir Mutt at Badrinath in the Himalayas, the Sringeri Mutt in Southern India, the Sharada Mutt at Dwaraka in Gujarat and the Govardhana Mutt[illegible]ri in Cuttack."

"The name Shankaracharya which means the preceptor Shankar properly belongs to the reformer Shankar alone, but after his death some of his followers appear to

have adopted the name as a title, probably as Mr. Ghose in his work on Hindu Law (p. 787) suggests, because they thought themselves incarnations of the reformer "

"The doctrines of Shankara having obtained a permanent footing in India, there naturally arose in the course of centuries other preachers besides the Mohants of the original Mutts who claimed to be incarnations of the founder and established new Mutts in his honour. On the other hand, the original Mutts did not continuously preserve their early prestige Thus we find the Mohant or Head of the Sringagiri Mutt writing in Saka 1774 (AD 1852) to the Mohant of Sharada Mutt a letter (Exhibit 333) in which he thought it necessary to make a statement of the conventional practice, bearing in mind the disrespect with which it is treated in the present generation. He relates how the Acharyas of the Govardhana and Jyotir Mutts degraded themselves to the position of Goswamins and thus these two Mutts remained without any Acharya though the Govardhana Mutt was subsequently revived by a Sanyasin from Gangoknokhal. He describes how Sanyasis of the Sringeri Mutt have established Mutts and set themselves up falsely as independent Acharyas."

The reference in that letter is obviously to some of the Mutts in the Nizam's list.

(5) The Govardhana Mutt was the subject matter of the case decided by the High Court of Patna in 1936. Some persons brought the suit for a declaration that Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha, the then head of the Mutt, was not properly appointed and was otherwise also disqualified to preside over the Mutt. The High Court held that his appointment was validly made by his predecessor and as the alleged disqualifications were all anterior to the appointment it was not for the court to question the

discretion of the predecessor who made the appointment in spite of them and accordingly dismissed the suit Sir Courtney Terral C. J. gave the judgement and Syed Fazl Ali J. agreed. It contains the following passages :—

" The trust in question is that of the Govardhana Mutt at Puri. This trust was founded as one of the four similar Trusts by a great religious leader in ancient times with the object among others of combating the spread of Buddhism. The founder Adi Sankaracharya divided India into four jurisdictions with a Mutt at the head of each. Under the western jurisdiction was placed the territory roughly corresponding to that now known as the Bombay Presidency, called the Sarada Mutt at Dwaraka. ... ... Northern India was placed under the Jyotir Mutt which is now extinct. Eastern India was placed under the Govardhana Mutt the object of the present dispute and Southern India under the Sringeri Mutt in Mysore. The head of each Mutt is known by the title of Jagadguru Sankaracharya and his religious authority is widely, if not universally, accepted."

(6) I may refer also to the statement of the Privy Council in 9 Moore's Indian Appeals page 375 that "the Sankaracharya of Sringeri was the chief priest of all Hindus of the South of India."

(7) I referred above to a decision of the Nizam of Hyderabad negativing the claims of 'petty' Mutts like Kumbaknoam etc With equal propriety I may refer to a decision of the Nawab of Walajah as early as 1763 whose sphere of authority included Kancheepuram. It is referred to in a judgement of Mr. F. R. Coleridge, I. C. S, dated 13—11—1915 when he was the District Judge of Madura. He says there—"I should explain that

both Komatis and Kasukaras look to His Holiness of the Sringeri Mutt as the Head of their religion and their supreme spiritual guide Exhibit Q1 is important as it is of 1831 and is a statement made to the Collector by one of the Komatis when the dispute arose over the Ruby Lila. I only here refer to it because in it he states that there was a previous dispute between themselves and the Beri Chetties over the same matter and it was referred to the Nawab of Walajah who after referring to the royal grants as to castes existing in Kancheepuram referred the matter to the Lokaguru Sankaracharya Swamigal of Sringeri and he decided against the Beri Chetties who were then fined by Ghulam Mohideen Sahib. This presumably refers to exhibit M. M. (Inayatnama issued by the Nawab in Persian in 1763) the order of the Nawab to Ghulam Khan to levy 12,000 varahans from the Beris as fine." This shows conclusively that in 1763 it was the Acharya of the Sringeri Mutt that had authority to decide religious disputes in South India including the town of Kanchi and none other.

II. Verdict of Jurists

Now we proceed to consider what eminent jurists say on the matter of the Mutts founded by Sri Sankaracharya. I include herein the statements made by judges outside their courts, for then they were not judges but only jurists.

(1) The earliest of such judges was Dr. Burnell who was the District Judge of Tanjore. He was an eminent Sanskrit scholar and, in editing a catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts, he says about a book alleged to have been written by Anandagiri—

"This seems to be quite a modern work written in the interests of the schismatic mathas on the Coromandal Coast which have renounced obedience to the Sringeri Mutt where Sankaracharya's legitimate successor resides."

He obviously refers to the Kumbakonam Mutt.

(2) Sri P. C. Divanji who was also a judge and an eminent scholar, says in his Introduction to Siddhanta Bindu—

"During his triumphant tour he took many disciples the most notable of whom were Sureswara, Padmapada, Totaka and Hastamalaka and founded four Mutts one in each corner of India, i. e, at Sringeri in Southern India, Puri in Eastern India, Dwaraka in Western India and Badarikasrama in Northern India..... "

"The third cause for the weakening of their influence was the internal dissensions between the disciples of the same Acharya due to the love of the power and pelf which the occupation of the Gadis at the Mutts carried with it and the consequent foundation of other rival Mutts and the assumption of the honorific title of Sankaracharya by their founders and their successors. Thus for Instances

there are newly founded Mutts in Kolhapur, Belgaum and Nasik in Deccan, Hampi and Kanchi in Southern India, Prabhaspatan, Dakor and Dholka in Gujarat and Benares in the United Provinces."

(3) Sri Bhuvaneswar Prasad Sinha, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, in his lecture on 'My Master' published as a supplement to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Journal of Bombay dated March 20, 1960, refers to " The four Pithas which had been established in the four corners of India by Adi Sankaracharya many centuries ago."

(4) Sri M. Patanjali Sastri, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, in an All India Radio Broadcast said—

"Adi Sankaracharya born at Kaladi in the far South travelled all over the country when there were no means of communication in the modern sense using Sanskrit as his medium for propagating what he believed to be the truth and established Mutts for such propagation in the four corners of India, at Joshi Mutt near Badrinath in the North, Dwaraka in the West, Puri in the East and Sringeri in the South, thus visualising Bharata as a single cultural entity."

(5) Sri T. L. Venkatarama Iyer, Judge of the Supreme Court of India, says in an article contributed to the Sringeri Kumbhabhishekam Souvenir in 1963—

"After touring through the length and breadth of the country, Sankara re-established the supremacy of the Vedic faith and, with a view to ensure its perpetuation for all time, he founded Mutts in all the four quarters of Bharatavarsha and among the most revered and renowned of them is the one at Sringeri".

In the Madras Sringeri Souvenir of the year 1965 he says:—

'Sankaracharya was also further of opinion that for the perpetuation of the Vedanta in future, Mutts should be established and that it should be their duty to inculcate knowledge of the Shastras and Vedas from generation to generation. In this manner, he established the Kalika Mutt at Dwaraka in the west, the Jyotir Mutt at Badari the Govardhana Mutt at Jagannath and the Sarada Mutt at Sringeri. They were called the Amnaya Mutts, the four Amnayas being distributed among them."

'6) Sri Bijan Kumar Mukerjee, Chief Justice of the Snpreme Court of India, says in his Tagore lectures on the Hindu Law of religious and charitable Trusts p 27, 28-

"In the 8th century AD there was born in Southern India of Brahmin parents, a person by the name of Sankara–a most remarkable person of whom any country and any nation could be proud. He was one of the world's greatest philosophers and spiritual leaders, a matchless dialectician and a born reformer ..... Like all leaders of new thought he combined rare spiritual excellence with sound practical wisdom and foresight . .....

"For the purpose of strengthening and maintaining' the doctrine of non-dualistic philosophy which he preached he established four Mutts or Monasteries at the four extremities of India, viz. Jyotir Mutt at Badrinath in the north, Sarada Mutt in Gujarat, Sringeri Mutt in South India and Govardhana Mutt at Puri in the east, and each one of them was placed in charge of his ascetic disciples".

On page 320 of the same book, he says the same thing thus —

"Thus Hindu Mutts were established for the first time by Sankara. He himself founded four Mutts at the four corners of India and made them centres of his Vedantic teachings. In the east he set up the Govardhana Mutt at Puri, in the north the Jyotir Mutt at Badrinath, in the west the Sarada Mutt at Dwaraka and in the south the Sringeri Mutt on the Tungabhadra. Each one of these Mutts was placed in charge of one of his four disciples who were Padmapada, Hastamalaka, Suresvara and Totaka".

(7) Sri P. B. Mukherjee, Judge of the High Court of Calcutta, in a speech on 12–9–1964 says about Sri Sankara :

" No intellectual genius, before or after him, had his scholarship and learning. As a saint and Yogi, he was one of the greatest the world has seen As a preacher, he was the most outstanding. As an evangelist, he was unique. As an intellectual, he was without an equal. As a commentator, he was the most authoritative and the most prolific. As an organiser, reformer and a man of action, he was unparalleled.

"In the four corners of India and in the four directions, he established the life radiating spiritual centres : in the east at Puri the Govardhan Mutt, in the south at Mysore the Sringeri Mutt, in the west at Dwaraka the Sarada Mutt and in the north the Jyoshi Mutt, with the trenchant Mahavakyas of the Upanishads as the inspiring ideals of these mutts. Ayam Atma Brahma, Aham Brahma Asmi, Tat Tvam Asi and Prajnanam Brahma. These four mutts are the spiritual sentinels keeping sleepless vigil to guard, preserve, maintain and enhance the essential traditions of spiritual life In each of them he installed his celebrated disciples Suresvara, Padmapada, Totaka and Hastamalaka as the Acharyas. In these four

citadels Sankara established Vedanta, the universal religion for the world. His life ended at the early age of 32. No man did more in 32 years than what Sankara did".

(8) An appeal for funds for the renovation of the Sringeri mutt building at Kasi, signed among others by :

1. Sri N Chandrasekhara Iyer,
   Judge of the Supreme Court of India,
2. Sri C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer,
   Vice-Chancellor, the Benares Hindu University.
3. Sri A. V. Ramanathan,
   Ex–Prime Minister of Bharatpur State,
4. Sri M. S. Aney, Ex-Governor of Bihar
5. Sri Binodananda Jha, Ex-Minister of Bihar
6. Sri P Rangaswami Naidu,
   Ex-Chief Judge of Pudukottai State.

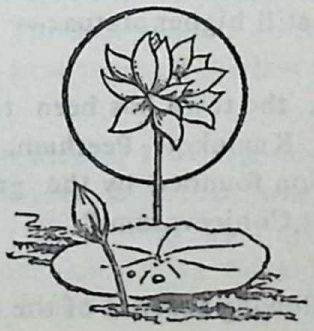
contains the following paragraph :—

"The unique significance of the great Sringeri mutt in India's spiritual revival is too well-known to the public of India to need any special reiteration. It has been referred to by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his classical book, 'The Discovery of India'. Of the four mutts established by Bhagavan Sri Sankaracharya, the Sarada Peetha at Sringeri holds an unrivalled position, as the most authentic exponent of the highest spiritual aspirations of a country which had been specially designed by a wise and far-seeing Providence to function as Queen of the east and spiritual teacher of mankind".

(9) Apart from Sri N. Chandrasekhara Iyer being a signatory to the above mentioned appeal, he has in an article contributed by him to the 'Hindu' on 13-8–1935 said : –

"Most people in India have heard of Sringeri in the Mysore Province, the place where Sri Sankara of imperishable fame, established one of his four principal mutts in India, installing his chief disciple Suresvara as its first head"

The above extracts show beyond doubt that it was the Sringeri Mutt that was established for the South of India. It is futile to urge that any other mutt was established at Kanchi or Kumbakonam or elsewhere. It cannot be urged that the eminent persons mentioned before wilfully ignored it. If they were ignorant of its existence, they share their ignorance with Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Swami Sivananda, Swami Rama Tirtha and an innumerable host of scholars, philosophers, saints and historians. An institution which has escaped recognition from all of them is certainly not entitled to get the recognition of lesser folk. As regards the opinions of these eminent personages and others, the reader may usefully refer to the books, "Sri Jagadguru Sankara Matha Vimarsa" Part 3 and "The Truth about the Kumbakonam Mutt" Part I, Chapters 16 and 17 and part II Chapter 4, and "Kumbakonam Matha Vishayaka Vivada (Section 47).



III. A "Fifth Mutt"

A few facts about the Kumbakonam Mutt which claims to be a fifth mutt will be found to be interesting:-

The Tanjore District Manual of 1883 is content with saying—"Cumbakonam :—At this place there is a branch of matam or abbey of Sankaracharya Swamy the founder of the School Advaita or Vedantha philosophy, presided over by a Chief Guru or Priest of the Smartha Hindus under the title of Sankaracharya". The District Gazetteer of 1906, develops this into—

"There is an important Smartha religious institution here in the Math of Sankaracharya which is said to have been founded in the time of Sankaracharya himself, by a Tanjore King who wished the saint to reside in his dominion".

This is patently absurd, as there was no king at Tanjore during the time of Sankaracharya and as the Math itself contains an inscription that it was constructed in 1821. An amendment was therefore necessary, and the present Acharya of that mutt was good enough to supply it himself as acknowledged by the editor of the District Gazetteer of 1933. This is the improved version which gives the mutt a still higher status :—

"Since 1731, the town has been the headquarters of the Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, a famous Smartha religious institution founded by the great Saivite teacher Sankaracharya at Conjeevaram."

"For the following account of the mutt, the compiler is indebted to its present head :-

"Sri Sankaracharya, the great Advaitic teacher, established four great mutts for the propagation and preservation of Vedic religion, at Badarikasrama in the Himalayas, at Dwaraka in Kathiawar, at Jagannath in the east coast and at Sringeri in Mysore State, appointing his four disciples as the heads of those institutions, and himself spent his last days at Conjeevaram, where he established the present mutt which continued there till 1731, when, owing to political troubles in the neighbourhood, it was removed to Tanjore, at the invitation of Raja Pratap Singh, and then to the banks of the river Cauvery at Kumbakonam at the special request of the then head of the mutt"

It will be interesting to compare this with a statement of a predecessor of his in 1844, that his Parama Guru wanted to reside on the banks of the river Cauvery, and hence came to Kumbakonam. There is absolutely no reference to Tanjore, or to any invitation from any king there.

We have positive evidence that Raja Pratap Singh did not become the king of Tanjore till 1739, and if there were any political troubles, these troubles were at Tanjore and not at Kanchi These facts are clear from the judgement of Spencer C. J. in the case reported in 1925 A. I. R. (Madras) p. 497. The suit related to the right of succession to the private properties of the last king of Tanjore

"After Tukkoji died in 1735, his legitimate son Baba reigned for about a year, and then was succeeded by his widow Sujana Bai, whose regency only lasted for a short period. A pretender known as Sevai Shaji or Katturaja (which signified in Tamil-jungle king) usurped the throne with the aid of a Mohammedan commander of the fort

named Said. The usurper was assassinated and the principal men in the state, assisted by Said-the King-maker-first put Saiyaji the second legitimate son of Tukkaji on the musnud and secondly Pratap Singh, the son of Tukkaji by his sword wife Annapurni. Pratap Singh's first act was to have Said put to death. He ruled for 24 years, and during his reign his forces came into conflict with the army of Mohamed Ali the Nawab of Arcot, and with the troops of the East India Company, and with the French under Lally. In 1762, by the intervention of the British, a treaty was concluded under which the Raja of Tanjore agreed to pay tribute to the Nawab at the rate of four lakhs of rupees annually. Pratap Singh died in 1763".

It is this Pratap Singh who did not hesitate to kill the person who helped him to the throne, and was ever involved in conflict with others, that is said to have devoutly invited the Acharya to Tanjore as a haven of peace free from political troubles. Throughout the long judgement of Spencer C. J. and Kumarasamy Sastri J, there is not the slightest reference to the Kumbakonam Mutt, though the palace history is traced down to the date of the suit.

That Pratap Singh could not have invited the Acharya is also very clear from another circumstance. Evidently with a view to cover up his illegitimacy and give himself an air of respectability, as soon as he got the throne he persuaded a holy man at Mannargudy in the Tanjore District to send a disciple of his to Tanjore, to be installed as a Raja Guru. In the case reported in 41 Madras 296 relating to the estate of Setubhavaswamy, the last of such Raja Gurus. Their Lordships of the Privy Council say ... ...

"There is no dispute as to the circumstances in which the original ancestor received the grant of land from the Raja of Tanjore. He was a holy man, who somewhere about the year 1739 was brought from a mutt or religious institution at Mannargudi to Tanjore and was constituted by the Maharatta ruler of Tanjore as his Guru, or religious preceptor. His descendants in regular succession became Gurus to the Raja as long as the Raj remained .

"The induction, as it may be called, by the Raja to the Office of Raja Guru, with a seat upon the Gadi was preceded by a religious ceremony in the nature of an ordination or initiation in which the Mahant or head of the parent Mutt placed the first defendant on the seat of headship, other heads of mutts taking part in the ceremony and certain religious rites following".

Why did Kumbakonam mutt swami, who claims to be the head of all the Mutts of India, if he did exist then allow himself to be superseded by a house-holder recruit from Mannargudy ? Is he included in the vague expression "other heads of mutts" who are said to have played second fiddle to the head of the parent Mutt at Mannargudi ?

The facts mentioned in the above two judgements prove beyond doubt that Kumbakonam Mutt had no secular or religious connection with the Tanjore Raj. But as the Mutt has existed at least from 1821, there is every reason to conclude that it was started as a branch mutt of Sringeri by a Karnataka Sanyasi disciple of Sringeri mutt. He gave himself naturally the name of Chikka Udayar Swami (Junior swami) as there was the Dodda Udayar Swami (Senior swami) at Sringeri. From the case reported in 51 Indian cases 876 it is seen that even the present Acharya of that Mutt claimed certain rights as Chikka Udayar Swami. Its calling itself as Sarada Mutt,

its possession of some records which obviously relate to Sringeri, its seal itself being in Kannada, its incumbent uptodate being all Karnatakas, and other factors confirm this. The development into a "Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham" is clearly an after-thought. A prior existence of the Mutt at Kanchi was formulated, and the origin of the Mutt was pushed back to a date 23 centuries earlier!

Before we leave this subject, we may refer to some incorrect and irrelevant observations found in one or two recent judgements of the Madras High Court :—

1. The Sirur Madhwa mutt, the Chidambaram Dikshitars and the Trustees of Guruvayur temple severally filed writ petitions against the Hindu Religious Endowments Board, Madras claiming almost identical relief. All the cases were heard together, and disposed of by a single judgement reported in 1952 (1) M. L J. 557. They have nothing to do with Sri Sankaracharya or his mutts. Yet in the judgement pronounced by Satyanaryana Rao and Rajagopalan J. J. we find these passages —

"Tradition has it. that after conquering the rival faiths, he established the Advaita system of philosophy and founded four Mutts or seats of learning in four corners of this vast sub-continent. Sringeri (Sarada Peetham) in Mysore in the South, with which it is familiar knowledge, the name of that great and erudite scholar and philosopher, Vidyaranya swami is associated; Badrinath in the Himalayas in the north; Jagannath or modern Puri in the east, and Dwaraka in the Bombay presidency in the west. In each of these mutts, as their heads, he installed his principal disciples, and he himself assumed the headship of Sarvagna Peeta, or the Central seat of Knowledge at Kanchi, the modern Conieevaram. This

central peetam was first shifted to Tanjore, and then to Kumbakonam, from where it continues to function even in the present day".

The reader will note, the above is almost word for word the same as the statement of the Kumbakonam Swami recorded in the Tanjore Gazetteer of 1933. Further comment is needless.

As mentioned before, Sri S Subramania Iyer, J, has said in 27 Madras 435, that there are 'No less than seven mutts." Evidently with a view to avoid any other new mutt claiming equal status with the 'fifth' this judgement hastens to add — "The reference to seven mutts of Sankaracharya, seems to be a mistake for five".

2. Rajagopalan, J, who was a party to the above judgement has. in a set of cases reported in 1956 AIR (Madras) 491, referred to one of the petitioners as —

> "His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya Swamigal the Matathipathi of the Mutt Sri Kanchi Kamakoti peetham, held in the highest esteem and veneration by a very large section of Hindus in the South".

In both these cases, the judges seem to have been influenced by their own personal attachement to make such statements, without caring to consider their relevancy or propriety. The Mutt and the Swami thereof certainly need no certificate of their worth from any body, and most certainly not from an extra-judicial pronouncement inserted irrelevantly in a judicial decision. It is not a matter of surprise, that the devotees of that Swami quote these passages frequently in season and out of season, as judicial pronouncements of the High Court of judicature at Madras having the force of law

It has been pointed out in the book 'The Truth about the Kumbakonan Mutt', how it has attempted to graft to its list of Acharyas well-known names in the field of Advaita just to make it an imposing one. One of them is Bodhendra, the champion of Namasankirtana. If he did belong to the heirarchy of that mutt, his Samadhi which is but a few miles away from Kumbakonam, must be in the management and under the control of that mutt, like the Samadhis of the recent Acharyas at Kalavai and Ilayathankudi. This Samadhi at Govindapuram, however, is quite a distinct institution, and has no connection with the Mutt. When the Endowments Board claimed jurisdiction over it, first as a Mutt, and then as a temple, it was the committee of Management of that institution, that contested successfully. The matter is reported in 1954 AIR (Madras) 1027. There is no reference at all there to the Kumbakonam Mutt, or to Bodhendra being an acharya of that Mutt.

IV. Sringeri and South India.

All the Mathamnayas, including the one put forward by the Kumbakonam Mutt, are unanimous in saying that the Sringeri Mutt was intended to minister to the spiritual needs of the southern part of this peninsula. Apart from the fact that it commands the respect and reverence of all Asthikas throughout India, it is well-known that the Maharajas of Mysore, Travancore, Cochin etc. and the Rajas of Kollengode, Ramnad, Sivaganga etc in the south are among its most devoted disciples. It is known also that the Pudukkottai State accorded recognition to the Kumbakonam Mutt only very recently, when Sri A Seshia Sastri of Kumbakonam happened to be in charge of that state for some time.

All followers of Sri Sankara in South India are the disciples of the Sringeri Mutt, though they may go to or reside in other provinces for their livelihood or convenience. Even when the Kumbakonam mutt with the help of obliging Pandits drew up a geneology and provided itself with a literature "quoting" passages from 'ancient' works available only to them, the general public did not take any serious notice of them. But the present head of that Mutt, by giving prominence to such literature and by his method of propaganda, has carved out a set of devoted disciples, whose devotion is measured mainly by their antipathy to the Sringeri Mutt. The latter however is proverbially indifferent to any kind of advertising itself, and it is impossible to expect it to counter-act such propaganda. Only such devotees as have the enthusiasm and time enough for such work must take it up earnestly and see that the public are not misled.

There is a wealth of information in the records in the possession of the Sringeri Mutt and, if they are perused many interesting and important pieces of information can

be obtained. But most of them are written in Kannada, Marathi and other scripts with which the modern scholar is not usually familiar. The records in Tamil are very few, and those in English are fewer still. When the British took charge of the administration of the country, an entire village was counted as a revenue unit, and a single patta issued for the whole village held by the villagers in shares. In assessing the revenue from a village an item called 'Sri Sankaracharya Biksha' was also collected by the Government and handed over to Sringeri Mutt. When the Government later on decided to issue patta to the villagers individually, it took upon itself the responsibility of paying the Mutt, and so far as Tirunelveli is concerned, the Mutt is even now receiving from Government annually a sum of about Rs 150/- on this account. Besides having Mutt buildings at Madras, Kanchipuram, Vellore, Coimbatore, Madura, Rameswaram, Tirunelveli, Satyamangalam, Gobichettipalayam, and other places in the Tamil Nadu Districts, the Mutt has extensive lands there. From time immemorial, daily poojas are being done also in the temples at Tirupathi, Srirangam etc in the name of the Mutt. It is well-known also that the priests in the temple at Remeswaram can serve there only after due initiation by the Sringeri Acharya.

In this context it may not be irrelevant to refer to a few facts culled from some papers picked up at random. They necessarily relate to recent times.

1. When Sri Narasimha Bharati Swaminah toured the Tamil districts about the year 1838, and again about the year 1872, the residents of many a town and village have submitted memorials and representations signed by the most prominent of them.

2. In most of the temples which he visited, particularly at Tirunelveli, Madura, Rameswaram, Jambukeswaram, Kanchipuram, Madras and other places, the temple authorities have prepared detailed reports of the reception accorded to him of the offerings made by him at every shrine in the temple and other particulars.

3. The circular issued by William Eliot, Head Assistant Magistrate, Salem Dist., on 16—1—1838 is interesting to read. It is addressed to the Police, Tahsildar, Sheristadar, Sub-Police-Officer, Kottaval, Thanadar, Duffadar, Village Munsiffs, and all other Government Officers and says.

"Sri Sankaracharya Swamigal of Sringeri is proceeding on a Pilgrimage to the Setu. through Trichinopoly District, and is accompanied by elephants, camels. horses, carriages, swords etc, weapons, chattrams, chamarams and other paraphernalia. Besides allowing him to proceed without any obstruction, you are required to procure for him, when he is in your jurisdiction, rice, dhal horsegram, milk, curds, firewood etc. at proper prices, to guard him against theft, during the nights, to secure for him if required any additional carriages and bulls at proper rates, and generally act in consonance with the Government orders in his possession, and with the traditional practice. This must be observed, both when he comes there now, and when he is returning"

4 A similar circular of N. W. Kindersley Esq., Collector and Magistrate of Tanjore on 26—2—1838 to 'all persons concerned' says -

"Sri Sankarachariar Swamiar of Sringeri is coming on a tour of the country with the following weapons etc. He must be allowed to proceed without any hindrance.

'Elephants 5, camels 5, horses 60, bulls and cows 100, carriages 20, Palankeems 7, Panuku 50, Swords 50, Palliam 20, Kattari 20, Troopers 34, Sepays 21, peons 21.'

"It must be seen that no theft takes place where he stays, and you must secure for him articles, workmen etc. at proper rates."

5. It appears that when Sri Narasimha Bharati Swaminah visited Madras in 1870, along with the Junior Swamy Sri Sachchidananda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati Swaminah, there was much of Police control, so much so, that licences had to be obtained for going in procession from one street to another. It is seen from some of the licences, that he went to the Kannikaparameswari temple on 1—5 1870, to the houses of various devotees on various dates and that he left Madras on 8—12—1870.

6. Even after he left Madras, he seems to have kept up correspondence with Lord Napier, the then Governor of Madras. The Private Secretary of the latter writes to his Holiness on 9—2—1871 thus—

"Colonel Fordyce, by desire of the Right Hono'ble Lord Napier has the honour to inform Narasimha Bharati Swami that His Lordship thanks him for his letter of the 5th instant, also that his Lordship has heard with pleasure that he has taken measures for furthering the study of the Sanskrit language. Lord Napier is much grateful by the kind expressions of Narasimha Bharati Swami regarding the prolongation of his Lordhip's stay in the Madras Presidency".

7. When Sri Sachchidananda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati Swaminah started on a tour in 1891—1892, the Government of Madras issued a general order on

7—11—1891 and in implementing the same, the Inspector General of Police, Madras, issued the necessary instruction and wrote to the Agent of the Mutt on 22—6—1892 thus—

"Sir, With reference to your letter of the 1st June 1892, I have the honour to inform you that the Superintendents of Police of the marginally noted Districts through which the Guru intends to proceed on a pilgrimage have been asked to supply Police Guard of 1 Head constable and 6 constables during the Swami's stay in these Districts: Coimbatore, Trichy, Madras, Tirunelveli, Tanjore, Salem & South Arcot.

2 I request that you will take care to inform the Superintendents concerned as to the date on which the Guru will arrive in their respective Districts, so as to give those officers time to keep the guard ready".

I refer to the above documents just to show that if any competant scholar devotes himself to the task of ransacking the records of the Sringeri Mutt, he will unearth many a piece of information of great historical value, and he may incidentally be able to find out how and when the subsidiary Mutts came into existence.

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V. Dharma Prachara

Before closing, it will be interesting to consider some of the recent activities of the Sringeri Mutt in the field of educating the public in matters of religion.

Sri Sachchidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharat Swaminah, in the course of his tours in South India in or about 1894 and 1909, noted that the knowledge and practice of our ancient Dharma had declined and with a view to educate the public properly, he inaugurated many a religious institution in very many places. It was mainly due to the initiation and inspiration of this Acharya that the Vivekasamvardhani Sabha at Tirunelveli, the Dharma Sastra Sabha at Madura, and Advaita Sabha at Tiruchirapalli were started. The association now known as the Kumbakonam Advaita Sabha was itself started at his instance, by the then prominent leaders of South India like Sri S. Subramania Iyer of Madras, Rao Bahadur Appu Sastri of Kumbakonam, Sri Sambasiva Iyer of the Sri Vidya Press at Kumbakonam and Sri A. Krishnaswami Iyer of Tirunelveli. Sri Sambasiva Iyer brought out a series of advanced works on Advaita like Advaita Siddhi, Brahmanandiyam, Siddanta Bindu, and Nyaya Rakshamani all graced by the Srimukha of the Sringeri Acharya.

The association was intended for the benefit of the entire Tamil Nadu, and Sri P. R. Sundaram Iyer, Judge of the High Court of Madras, made provision for periodical lectures by eminent Pandits throughout the Tamil Districts. But in course of time, it has become a merely local institution.

A very rich landlord Sri Prasanna Venkateswara Rao of Srirangam came under the influence of the Christian missionaries at Tiruchirapally and was about to be converted to Christianity. The Acharya, when informed

about it immediately sent for him, though he was a Madhwa by birth, and by timely advice saved him. Sri T. K. Balasubrahmania Iyer of Srirangam and Sri Bhuvarahacharya of Karur used to describe this incident in glowing terms. Sri Bhuvarahacharia of Kumbakonam has referred to it in one of his articles in the Tamil Journal Sri Sankara Kripa.

To counteract the influence of Christian missionaries through their educational institutions at Trichy, the National High School (now the National College) was started there, and the Sringeri Mutt contributed Rs. 20 per mensem towards the salary of a Pandit, engaged to conduct a religious class for the students. This contribution was given continually for a period of over 30 years till it was stopped, when the Government of Mysore took charge of the temporal administration of the mutt. This is gratefully acknowledged by Advocate Sri V. Jayarama Iyer, the then correspondent of the College in his letter dated 23—7—1936, thus . . .

"His Holiness, the late Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Narasimha Bharati Swamigal during one of his visits to Trichy felt the need for religious instruction being imparted to students going to Hindu schools. He felt that the need was specially great in a city like Tiruchy which was, and has been suffering a good deal from Missionary influence. Ours is one of the few institutions in this province, which has been trying to keep alive the flame of Hindu orthodoxy and the principles of Sanatana Dharma. Our students who are easily numbering over a thousand have had the benefit of religious instruction for nearly three decades as a result of the generosity of your Mutt contributing Rs. 20 per mensem towards the salary of the Pandit in charge of the Veda Classes".

The same Acharya used to send for eminent Pandits from Maharashtra, Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil and other regions, and give them great encouragement. Brahma Sri Srinivasa Sastri of Nadukkaveri was specially deputed by him year after year to perform the Sri Sankara Jayanti festival at Kaladi, the birth place of Sri Sankara Bagavatpada Mahamahopadhyaya Harihara Sastri of Chidambaram, Mahamahopadhyaya Ganapathy Sastri of Painganad, Halasynatha Sastri of Kumbakonam, Mahamahopadhyaya Lakshmana Suri of Madras and other well-known Pandits of his time are known to have been greatly devoted to him. Sri Subrahmanya Sastri of Tediyur who accompanied his Guru Sri Harihara Sastri, in his visit to the Acharya at Sringeri has in a pamphlet of his graphically described it.

With the same object in view as was responsible for the founding of the National High School of Trichy, Rao Bahadur Appu Sastri of Kumbakonam aforesaid founded the Native High School (later known as Town High School) of Kumbakonam itself. He was deeply attached to the Sringeri Acharya and was specially honoured by him in 1910 at Aiyampalayam, where he was staying for the Chaturmasyam that year. He himself went to Sringeri and had Mantropadesa from his Holiness. It appears from his letter dt. 6 - 1—1912 addressed to the Agent of the Mutt that a substantial contribution has been made long before in aid of that High School. A few extracts are given below :-

"May I request you to be so kind as to offer my most humble salutations and devoted Namaskarams to His Holiness, and remember me to him when he is at leisure; His blessings are to me a treasure spiritual as well as material ..

"By His Holiness' blessings and upadesam I have been living till now. Every day I offer my Namaskarams twice at least to His Holiness(my Guru and the Jagadguru) first, then to Paramasiva and then to Bala Tripurasundari. My Japam every day gives me peace of mind and consolation ..

"You have already given me substantial encouragements. With the aid of the support you were pleased to give, I have put up a building worth more than Rs. 6000 two years ago... .....

"I have already written to you once about it. I write again to request you, with the approval of His Holiness to give me permission to utilise a portion of the donation given by His Holiness. for forming a Sanskrit Library which I wish to bring into existence. I have already purchased in anticipation of your sanction some rare Sanskrit books and I mean purchasing more. ... ..."

As soon as His Holiness returned to Sringeri in 1895, he widened the scope of the Matha Pathasala, gave it the name of "Sadvidya Sanjivini Pathasala," sent for a large number of competant scholars and made adequate provisions for them and the students.

On his return to Sringeri in 1910. he had the Sankara Matt Pathasala opened at Bangalore for advanced courses of study.

His successor Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Swaminah improved the Pathasalas at Sringeri and Bangalore, and in addition started a Veda Pathasala and a Vedanta Pathasala at Kaladi. In addition to the usual Ganapati Sabha for about ten days beginning with Vinayaka Chaturthi every year, to which eminent Pandits from all over India were invited, he instituted a similar Vidwat Sabha to be held at Kaladi, during the Sankara Jayanti celebrations. He appointed also some Pandits for delivering religious lectures in the Tamil Districts, and for

holding classes in the Sringeri Mutts at Mysore, Nanjangud, Gobichettipalayam, Tirunelveli and other places for the exposition of the Bhashyas and other sacred literature

The present Acharya, Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Swaminah has appointed a large number of Pandits as Asthana Vidwans and has asked them to propagate Dharma throughout the land. For the benefit of those who may not find time or convenience to attend these lectures, he has started an All-India-wide institution called Akhila Bharatha Sankara Seva Samiti which besides organising occasional conferences, and holding classes at various places, is conducting a monthly journal 'Sri Sankara Kripa' in Tamil for broadcasting the principles of Dharma; monthly journals of the same name, are now issued in Telugu and Kannada also. It is also publishing a series of Tamil translations for the valuable Prakaranas and Sastras of Sri Sankara Bagavatpada, and also various other publications within the reach of the public.

Though Their Holinesses have been so graciously intent upon inculcating Dharma in the minds of even ordinary people, it has to be pointed out that for Their efforts to bear the expected fruit, it is necessary that the people also should be responsive enough to profit by them.

Their Holinesses the Jagadgurus of the Dwaraka and Puri Mutts, and the heads of several subsidiary and new Mutts are also engaged in doing Dharma Prachara each in its own way. But when the idea of claiming equality with, or superiority over the four recognised mutts gets into the mind of the head of any of the latter, their Dharma Prachara is only a cloak for mutt-propaganda. It is really unfortunate, that a Sannyasi who is expected to lead an ideal life of renunciation should allow himself to be led by egoistic impulses and stoop to hood-wink the publ c

VI. Duty of the Disciples

It may be that no honest enquirer into truth is likely to be influenced by any vigorous propaganda engaged in by any other mutt to secure a status equal to the original four mutts. Nor are these well established mutts likely to be disturbed by such propaganda. But the ordinary public, who do not stoop to think or learn but are generally influenced by loud and persistant clamour, run the risk of being misled. It may be urged that nobody is hurt by any body, calling himself a Sankaracharya or even as an Avatara of God. This is not correct. If the dignity attached to the name of Sankaracharya really belongs to the incumbents of the four original mutts, nobody else has the right to assume that title. As remarked by Their Lordships of the Privy Council in 3 Moores' Indian Appeals page 198 "the usurper of a dignity is guilty of a wrong which is to a certain degree prejudical to every one who has just title to the dignity".

Their Lordships of the Bombay High Court express the same view in 33 Bombay 291 thus ... .

"The opposition was based upon practical as well as sentimental grounds, for it is customary for a successful preacher to receive money-offerings from his admirers, and the attraction of followers to the Dholka Mutt involved the withdrawal of probable or possible donors of offerings from Dwaraka Mutt. The appearance of Dholka Mutt as Sankaracharya in Gujrat may have affected the prestige as preachers of the heads of Sarada Mutt ... ... ". It is sufficient for our purpose to rely on the latter sentence.

It scarcely needs pointing out that, when it is a wrong to claim an equal status with the real dignitary, the wrong is more grievous when the claim is to a higher status and when eminent personage like Sri Sureshwara, and Sri Vidyaranya are denied the status of Paramahamsas and seats in the Sringeri pedigree. Their Lord-

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ships who have recognised in the above two cases, the existence of a genuine wrong viewed both in its practical and sentimental aspects still come to the conclusion that the wrong though real will not give rise to an actionable claim enforceable through Courts.

Even granting that it is an actionable claim, we have the patent fact that the Sringeri Mutt is proverbially indifferent to praise or blame, and will not stoop to appeal to courts for vindication of its dignity and privileges. The Acharyas of that Mutt have throughout its history maintained its dignity and commanded the homage and respect of prince and peasant alike by their exemplary character and universal love. Offerings are made to them in quite a lavish manner, not because they yearn for them or canvass them or have touts and brokers to secure them, but only because of their intrinsic worth, which appeals to the public They will not care to have their dignity confirmed or protected by any resort to judicial proceedings or by any appeal to the executive Governments. This attitude is quite proper in as much as they are true Sannyasis

But this does not absolve the Government or the people from the duty to preserve, maintain and safeguard the dignity of the Mutt or to resent protest against, and prevent the lightest encroachment upon it. Even if the Government, under the plea of being a secular Government, is slow to move in the matter, it is the imperative duty of the disciples of the Mutt, to make it move in time and effectively and to properly educate such of the public as may not be aware of the true position. This is a piece of service to the Guru which has to be done by a diseiple without any requisition by the Guru and without any fear of the displeasure or censure of any body and without expectation of any reward or even appreciation from anybody else, for it is a duty which he owes to himself as a disciple.

SALEM
10—12—72

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